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a special report on gambling by the
Montana Kaimin

LUCK OF THE DRAW

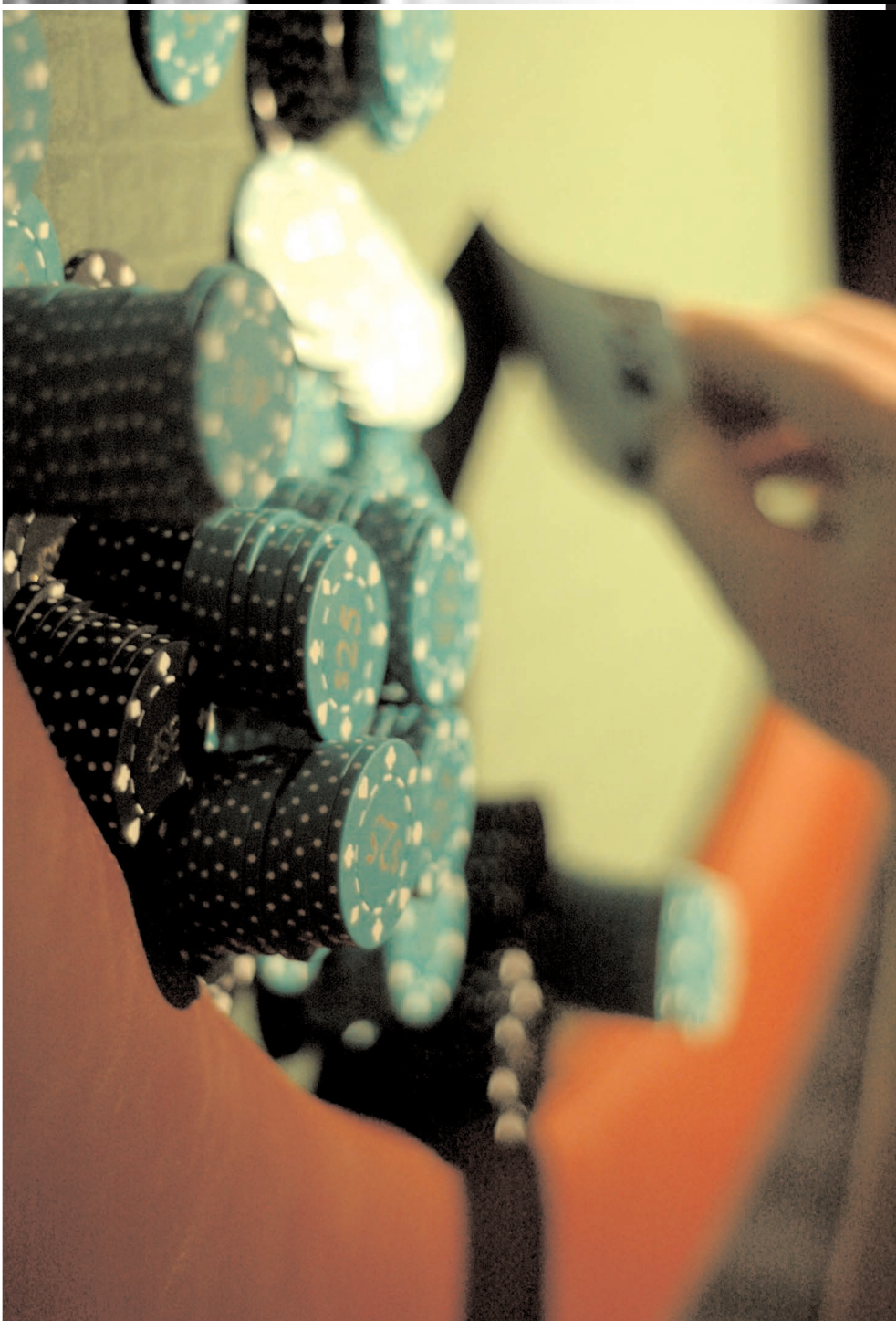
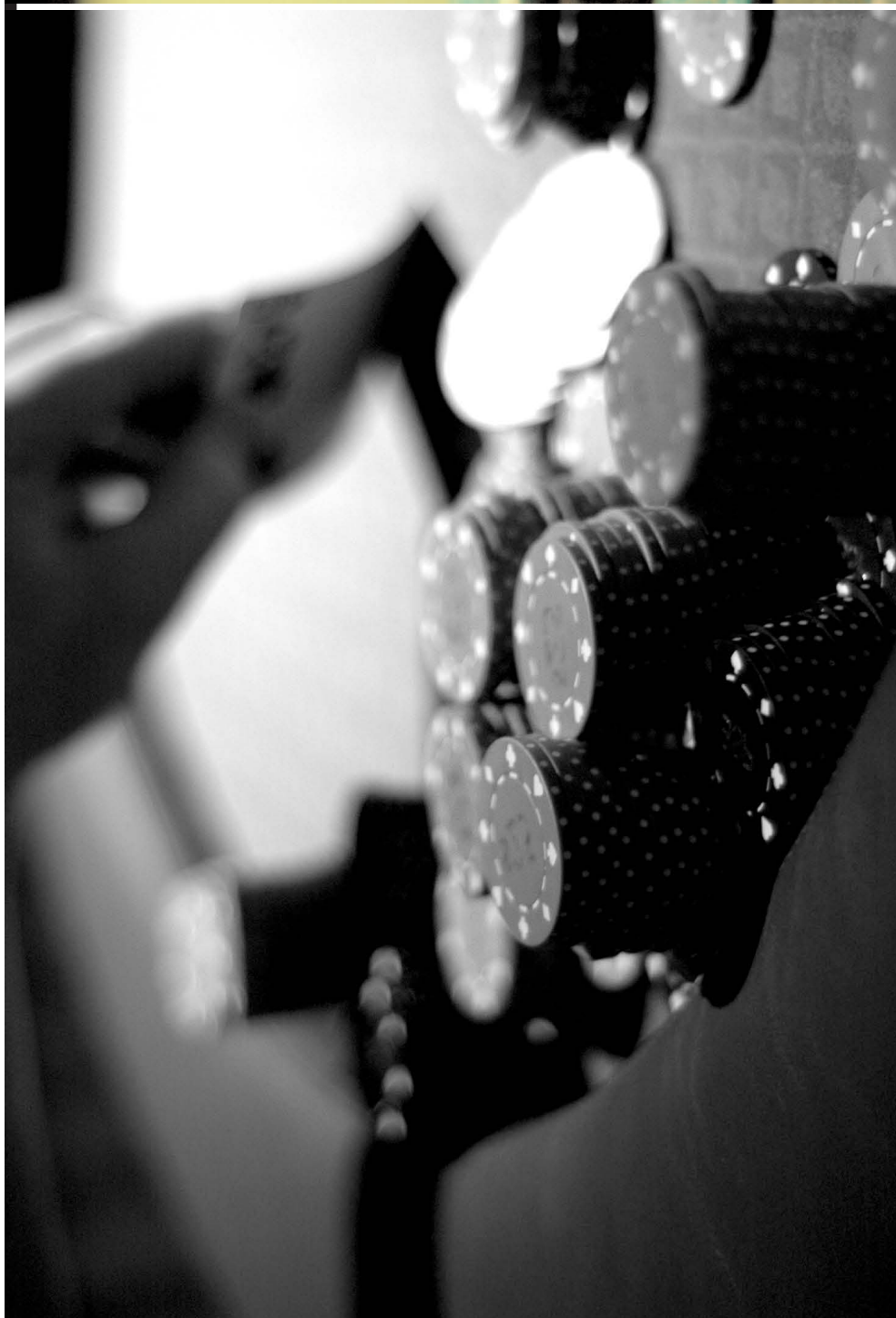
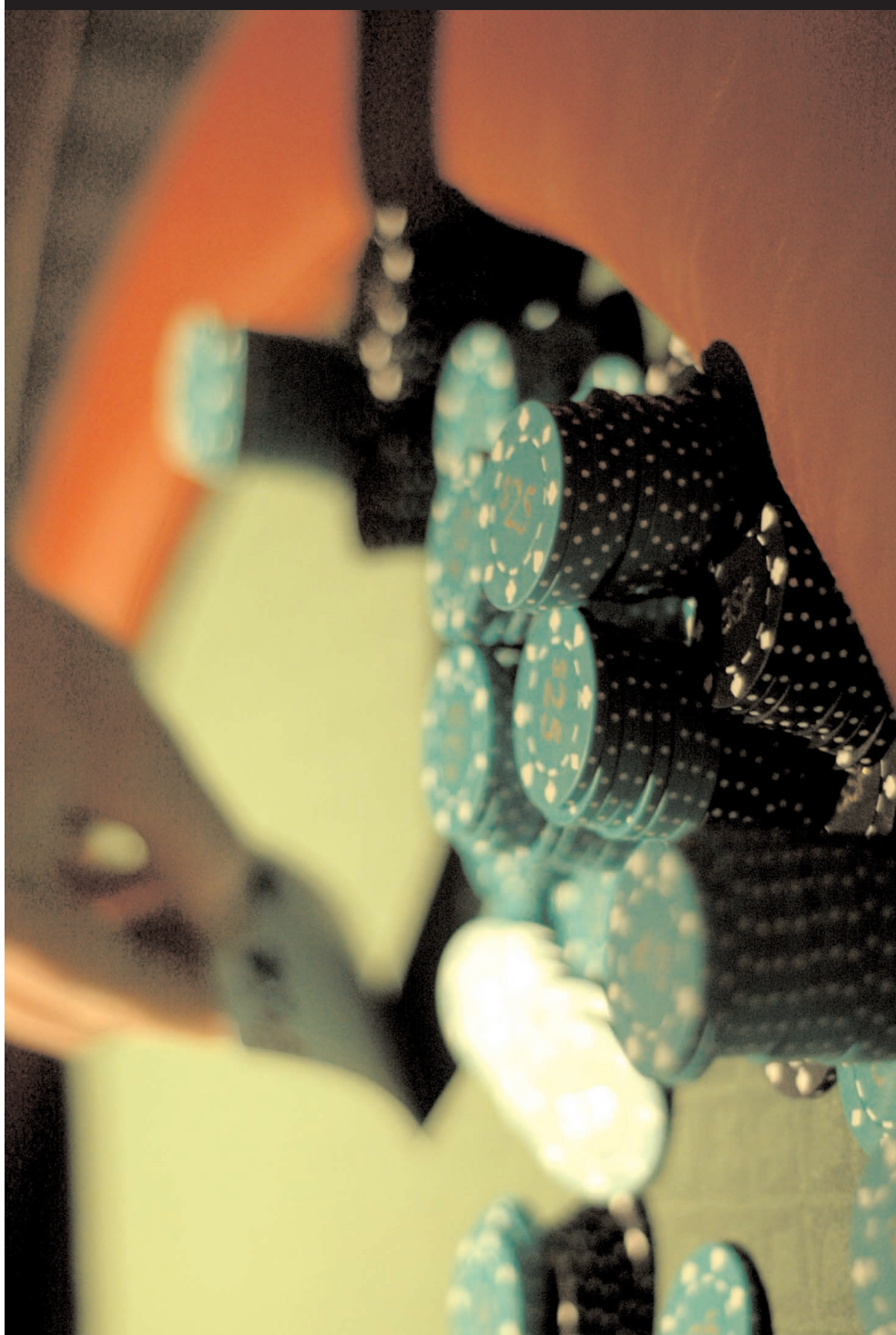




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Our
108th
Year

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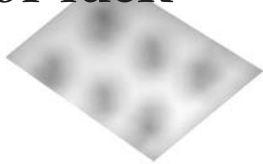
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For love (and loss) of the game



A UM student's love of poker, and faith in friends, leaves him in the hole and out of luck



by Emma Schmautz



Kee Rice logged onto his online poker account last year and stared at the huge balance of money he owed.

Not only was he \$1,200 in debt, but Rice wasn't even the one who had gambled the money away.

"I think I swore possibly," Rice said. "I don't get really mad but I was quite unhappy."

Rice is not currently enrolled at the University of Montana and is living in Bozeman, but he will return to UM as a sophomore history major next year. He was a freshman at UM when he let his friend play on his online poker account.

The friend was a student at the time but is currently not attending UM.

Some UM students who know him theorize that he dropped out of school because he did not have enough money to pay for tuition due to his gambling debts.

The friend did not respond to any phone calls or e-mails from the Kaimin.

When his friend began playing on Rice's account with \$25, Rice never dreamed he would run up a tab of \$1,200.

The friend has been very slow to repay the money and currently still owes Rice \$800, Rice said.

Rice is preparing to file a civil lawsuit against his old friend.

But unlike many students who might be outraged if a friend put them \$1,200 in debt, Rice is fairly laid back about the whole situation.

But that is just the attitude he usually adapts when gambling.

Except that one time he lost \$2,000 playing Texas Hold 'Em with students from Southern Oregon University.

"I saw a lot of money disappear in a day," Rice said. "It was not very fun. You don't sleep, that's one thing."

Rice began gambling when he was a high school student in Juneau, Alaska.

"It just started as friends who were bored and trying to figure out stuff to do on the weekend," Rice said.

They started by holding \$10

poker tournaments and slowly kept increasing the buy-in and playing with bigger and bigger pots.

By the time he came to UM, Rice was in love with gambling and the game of poker.

"I can't really describe why I like it," Rice said. "It's fun. When it's good it's more a satisfaction than a joy."

Rice said that there are definitely two sides to gambling.

"Highs are good. Lows suck," Rice said.

And he's experienced his share of both.

During his first time playing online blackjack he won \$1,000.

But he has also lost his share of big pots.

"There's been a lot of down for sure," Rice said. "I try to have a positive attitude. I know I have the talent that I can consistently make money."

While he likes the fact that a person can play many hands quickly online, Rice prefers live poker games with friends and playing at casinos.

When he was a UM student, the Press Box was his favorite Missoula venue for playing poker.

Rice said the trick to winning in poker is to pretend that you aren't playing with real money so that you can bluff people out of real pots.

"You can't think of it as actual money to play well," Rice said. "You have to bully people around. You can't look at it as 'Wow, I could buy a lot of clothes.' You have to look at it as how much I have right now at the table."

For people looking to get into the world of poker, Rice stresses the importance of needing a bankroll. He said that professionals recommend having at least \$5,000 so that you can afford go on a bad streak and still have enough money to win your losses back.

He said his years at playing Texas Hold 'Em have taught him that poker is all about discipline and patience.

"Try not to be antsy," Rice said. "Always be thinking how not to

give away your hand through betting. (Poker) is definitely a thinking man's game."

But he doesn't recommend playing poker as a way for college students to boost their financial status.

"Most likely they'll just end up broke or poor," Rice said. "But if you have the money (to begin with), then do it. See what happens."

Rice hasn't been gambling recently because he is low on cash,

but he is planning to get a job this summer so he can build up his bankroll and get back into playing poker.

He finds the game very relaxing and said he'll start playing in the evening and be so focused that when he looks up the clock will read 7 a.m.

Rice said that unless he goes horribly broke or has "some massive epiphany" he doesn't plan on laying the cards down for good anytime soon.

Whether he's at online blackjack or losing hundreds in games of college poker, Rice never veers from his enjoyment and easygoing attitude toward a pastime that is full of financial risk and hazard.

But for once, his plans for the next week don't involve bets, chips or cards.

"I'll be up to Missoula," Rice said. "I've got to file those court papers."



Eleena Fikhman/Montana Kaimin

The Press Box hosts poker games Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays every week. On a typical evening there can be up to four or five tables at one time.



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Looking for a way out

by Keriann Lynch

With limited options for treatment, those with the addiction most likely to lead to suicide have to look hard for help

Gambling addiction may run rampant in Montana, but few addicts ever seek help, a local gambling counselor said.

“I’d say there are probably only about 25 people in counseling for gambling addiction in Missoula right now, but go down to the casinos on any afternoon and the people there are the actual number that need help,” said Quinton Hehn, a licensed clinical professional counselor.

The low number of people in treatment might be a result of lacking resources in Missoula, said Diane McLaverty, a counselor at St. Patrick Hospital.

“There just isn’t a lot of help in the area,” said McLaverty. “It’s amazing how widespread gambling is in Montana, and while the services may be getting better, they’re nowhere near where they need to be.”

Hehn disagrees.

“It’s always nice to see more help; you can’t say it’s a bad thing,” said Hehn. “But, while there is need for people to be in counseling, new programs would be starving. This isn’t an addiction where a lot of people seek help.”

There are currently four treatment programs in Missoula geared specifically toward addressing gambling addictions: St. Patrick Hospital, Reformers Anonymous, Gamblers Anonymous and Hehn’s practice. All of the programs are outpatient group treatments.

According to the latest Montana gambling study conducted by the Montana Gambling Counsel in 1998, about 23,400 Montanans were problem gamblers and 78 percent of Montana adults had reported gambling in the past year. Of that 78 percent, 24.2 percent were between the ages of 18 and 29.

“While college students haven’t traditionally been who we see the most, they’re really having issues with the advent of Internet gambling,” said Gary Knopp, one of only three certified gambling counselors in the state and head of the gambling addiction program at the Rimrock Foundation in Billings. “It’s devastating and can drop



PEOPLE DO IT FOR FUN AND AS A FORM OF ENTERTAINMENT TO BEGIN WITH. IT TAKES AWHILE, AND USUALLY SOME NEGATIVE EFFECTS, BEFORE THEY’LL ADMIT THE PROBLEM AND SEEK HELP.”

**- QUINTON HEHN,
PROFESSIONAL COUNSELOR**

them out of college, but they’re less likely to seek help because they still have a lot of youth and vigor, and they’ll try to figure it out on their own.”

McLaverty and Hehn said they rarely see college students in their programs.

“I have several patients who say they started off then, but didn’t realize it was a problem until later,” said Hehn. “People do it for fun and as a form of entertainment to begin with. It takes awhile, and usually some negative effects, before they’ll admit the problem and seek help.”

According to the National Council on Problem Gambling, problem gambling is characterized by a perceived need for gambling, a need to bet more money more frequently, and restlessness or irritability when attempting to stop. Problem gamblers often “chase” losses by trying to earn

them back by gambling more and continue gambling despite serious negative consequences.

“A lot of times, by the time the call me, they’re pretty desperate,” Hehn said. “One woman had gambled away four \$1,700 paychecks in a row before she came in. By that point, there was nothing left; she just wanted to survive.”

Many problem gamblers also use gambling as an escape, lie to family members and therapists to hide their addiction, commit illegal acts, like writing bad checks, to finance their gambling and rely on others to bail them out of debt, Knopp said.

“Gamblers like to be secluded and hide what they’re doing from people, and college kids are in the perfect situation to do that,” said Knopp, a recovered addict himself. “They are away from home, their parents are isolated and they can easily hide what they do. It’s an invisible illness.”

Gamblers tend to fit one of two profiles, McLaverty said.

“There tend to be escape gamblers, the type of person that will play the video machines, and then you have the high-rollers or adrenaline junkies playing live poker down at a place like the Oxford,” McLaverty said.

The counseling programs at St. Patrick Hospital and Hehn’s practice are funded by the state’s Gaming Association. The state of Montana provides no money for gambling addiction treatment, despite receiving 15 percent of the gambling profits in the state, Hehn said.

“We’re in bed with the devil,” Hehn said. “The Montana Gambling Council asked the state to provide money for counseling, and when they said no, the MGC turned to the Gaming Association. I think they saw a pending lawsuit and decided to help out.”

St. Patrick Hospital and Hehn both hold two-hour group therapy sessions once a week to provide information and support for gambling addicts.

“St. Patrick’s is an open-ended group, so they may come one time, go out and gamble again and we’ll never see them come back,” McLaverty said. “It’s a pretty high turnover rate and relapse addiction.”

St. Patrick focuses on helping people figure out whether they have a problem, providing information for help and discussing other issues that contribute to gambling.

“A lot of gambling problems come from

other problems like grief and loss issues,” McLaverty said. “They’ll just wrap themselves in a cocoon, away from others, and plug in those quarters.”

Hehn said he focuses on improving addicts life physically, with eating and sleep habits, mentally, with books and information, and spiritually.

“If they believe in something, I want them at a church,” said Hehn. “If they want to worship trees, I don’t care, but they better come in with dirt on their knees then.”

Reformers Anonymous is a national, faith-based addiction program affiliated with the Fundamental Independent Baptist Church. It holds two-hour, weekly group sessions, in Missoula focusing on gambling and other addictions, said Gregg Meidinger, a group leader.

“We use prayer and testimony for treatment, including Bible readings, memorization and biblical essays,” Meidinger said. “Other programs can offer a lot of help, but until you give up addiction to Jesus Christ, there isn’t full healing. The success of Reformers is based in Jesus Christ.”

Gamblers Anonymous is a nationwide program that sponsors groups, run by the gamblers themselves, in which addicts gather to talk and provide support. The Gamblers Anonymous Web site and hot line currently list two groups regularly meeting in Missoula.

Programs in which gambling addicts meet without accountability aren’t as successful, Knopp, of the Rimrock Foundation, said.

“Groups like Gamblers Anonymous do a lot of good, but you can’t recover from just one meeting or group talk,” Knopp said. “There just isn’t enough psychotherapy.”

Group, peer support is important, but most effective when coupled with professional counseling, Hehn said.

“In anonymous groups people have a tendency to come and leave, just dropout and disappear,” Hehn said.

The suicide rate for problem gamblers is 20 percent higher than people suffering from any other addiction, Knopp said.

“It’s a very lethal addiction,” he said. “You can’t hardly change the channel anymore without seeing a poker game, and for college students the temptation to try to turn \$20 into \$200 is even higher than for most.”

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KIDS MEALS

Getting into the game

by Jennifer Reed



The obscure poker table at Stockman’s Bar in downtown Missoula is inviting. Chip values are ranked in order of least to most expensive on a poster behind the dealer opposite a cheat sheet of card hands: A royal flush is the strongest hand, followed by the straight flush and four of a kind and so on, all the way down to the single high card. Rules are straightforward: No cheating, what the dealer says goes and of course, “No foul language and no voodoo.” It all seems pretty simple.

But then the game begins. Brad Jarvis, a table owner and regular dealer at Stock’s, concentrates on the players as his familiar hands quickly grab small stacks of chips, toss out cards, go back for more chips, sweep up the finished game and shuffle the deck on their own. His eyes dart around the table, silently asking what must be obvious and understood questions, as the horseshoe of mostly older men respond in barely audible voices: “Fold.” “Call.” “Fold.” “I’m in.”

To a novice, the table — a “Poker Room,” they call it — might seem more daunting now. But according to Jarvis, that doesn’t stop newcomers from joining the game.

“We do get a lot of college students,” he said. “It’s Stock’s.”

So what’s pulling them in?

Jarvis suspects that more “newbies,” are drawn to poker tables now because of the influx of TV and Internet versions of the game.

“We get a bunch of people who watch it (on TV) and come in and say, ‘Oh, is this Texas Hold ‘Em?’” he said. “They will usually watch for a while and then play.”

But, he warned, no matter how much it’s televised, “a live card room is maybe not the best place

to try poker for the first time.”

Luckily, there are a lot of options for new players.

Jarvis suggests participating in a home game, practicing by playing on the Internet or reading a poker book before jumping into a live game.

“We hate them to have a very expensive experience for their first time,” he said.

Scott Burnham, a University of Montana law professor and instructor of the UM continuing education course “Poker for Fun and Profit,” agrees that there are better ways than others for first-timers to learn.

According to Burnham, an online poker site called www.pokerschoolonline.com helps new players learn the game by charging an initial fee to play and later using that money to reward the better players.

“It’s like paying for lessons,” he said.

Burnham also advises newcomers to play in tournaments instead of ring games. In a tournament, he said, similar to some of the online poker games, a player pays a fixed fee and then plays until the money is gone.

While Burnham agrees that the mathematics of the game, which he teaches in his poker class, as well

as a little research, is important for beginning players, there is one requirement he feels is absolutely necessary to learning to play the game correctly — and wisely.

“You have to play for money,” he said. “Otherwise, you will learn nothing. There will be no adverse consequences for playing badly.”



If they play a lot without actually betting, he said, when players finally come around to live poker, they’ll face the consequences — and likely get burned.

Of course, even without the worry of financial consequences, novices have a lot to learn.

Burnham’s main goal is to teach his students the discipline of the

need to know to learn what’s the right play in certain situations,” he said. “You can make the wrong play and win if you’re lucky, but in the long run, it’s going to catch up with you.”

The problem with a game like Texas Hold ‘Em, Burnham said, is that, like the song says, “you have to know when to hold ‘em and when to fold ‘em.”

“For a lot of people, it’s not much fun to sit there hour after hour and throw their hands away,” he said. “They have to develop the patience and the discipline to wait for the right cards and a lot of people don’t want to do that. They want the action.”

Jarvis said the most typical mistakes he witnesses newbies making are slip-ups with terminology or the misconceptions of the game at hand.

“The beginner mistakes are usually that people don’t understand the lingo and say the wrong thing. They’ll say ‘call’ and throw their cards in. They don’t understand everything that goes on.”

Burnham adds that another key element of the game is learning to read the other players. More important than the ability to detect “tells” — what a player might give away about his hand from physical movements — is being able to decipher what kind of player the person is, he said.

Jarvis agrees. While most new players get caught up in their own cards, he said, it’s important to keep other players’ hands in mind as well.

“The first time (playing poker), generally speaking, people don’t understand what a good winning hand is,” he said. “They may think it is a great hand because they have a pair, but they don’t realize what other players might have.”

According to Jarvis, while most bars around Missoula do not feature beginners’ poker tables, he has hosted brief instructional sessions at his table at Stock’s and at a table he owns at The Broadway.

In the sessions, Jarvis explained the concept of Texas Hold ‘Em,

the most frequently played poker game, ran through the rules and betting schemes and played a mock tournament so that newcomers could experience “a hands-on feel” for the game before jumping in.

Although he hasn’t run the sessions since last fall, Jarvis maintains that despite initial confusion, the game is still easy for beginners to learn.

“It’s a pretty simple game to pick up,” he said. “You get better at it. My demonstrations only lasted about 20 minutes. Board games are a lot more complicated than Hold ‘Em.”

However, beginners do have another alternative, he said: Several bars in Missoula offer free-roll tournaments, perhaps the closest thing to a beginners’ table and the real game.

A free-roll tournament, Jarvis said, is a poker tournament in which the host bar or casino gives players a certain amount of chips to play with for free. It gives the players a sense of the game and the rules, without the risk of financial ruin.

Derek Vieira, a freshman business major, has played in free-roll tournaments at The Buck’s Club, The Press Box, Paradise Falls and the Lucky Strike Casino.

“I like playing in them because they are free,” Vieira said. “Regular poker can be very irritating since some nights you can win some money, then the next night you will not even win a hand. Free-rolls aren’t stressful like the actual game is.”

Vieira said he has learned a lot about the game from participating in the free-roll tournaments. And it looks like Burnham was right about that luck thing.

“A lot of the regulars tend to be pretty good,” Vieira said, “but even with experience you rarely see the same person doing good every night.”

So what about other poker games, like live games or online poker? Not likely for Vieira.

“I am trying not to play in live poker games right now,” he said. “I have just moved into an apartment, so I no longer have money to blow.”

“YOU HAVE TO PLAY WITH MONEY. OTHERWISE, YOU WILL LEARN NOTHING,”
- SCOTT BURNHAM,
UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA LAW PROFESSOR

game. Poker, he said, is a game of skill and luck. And the hang-up he finds most frequently in his beginners is that they depend on the latter.

“I think the inexperienced players rely too much on luck and just don’t learn some of the math you

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Online addiction

by Daniel Person



Eleena Fikhman/Montana Kaimin

Bob, an Internet poker enthusiast, has been playing online for two years, sometimes up to 30 hours per week. Though he enjoys playing poker and dealing cards at local bars, he claims he isn't very good.

It's getting late. Your poker game has been carrying on for hours, and you're tired. But you're on the swing, catching some good hands and getting back some chips. So you put in your blind and see your cards.

Pocket 10's, you're gonna play. A 10, a two and an ace on the flop. You think it's yours, but the player across from you stays in. You go all in, he calls. He's got an ace. Gets a three on the turn. Your heart is pounding. Here's the river: Ace. You lose.

And just before you turn off your computer screen, poke_her223 types "good game lol."

No, this is not the poker game of Wild Bill Hickok played in Deadwood. This is poker in the 21st century. Over the past five years, online poker has exploded. Today, there are thousands of Web sites where people with a credit card and steel gut can go to play cards.

The most popular sites — Partypoker.com, Pokerstars.com and Paradisepoker.com — boast thousands of users at any given time.

At its peak, Party Poker has over 50,000 players playing at one time. That's a lot of cigars.

Online Swing

Bob and Tyson (who asked that their last names not be used) are two of many University of Montana students who play online poker. Bob is modest about his play, saying he has friends who

play a lot more than he does.

Still, he has been playing for two years, and says he has played up to 30 hours of online poker in a week. And even now, though he has cut back his play considerably, he says sometimes hundreds of dollars are on the line when he plays.

One time, he says, he was up \$700. But, as he puts it, "The swings are huge."

"You just lose it as quick as you got it," he said.

Bob is a dealer at a local bar, and says money is a little looser online.

"Everybody and their brother is on there and there's no skill," he says. "Money doesn't really apply to some people online."

Still, Bob says online poker offers some advantages over games in the real world.

Because of the number of people playing, more games can be offered. Also, huge tournaments where the buy-in is cheap but payout is big (but elusive) are easily found.

"Twenty-four hours a day, there's a poker game," he says.

On an average Friday afternoon, PokerStars reported that 1,922 tournaments were occurring at one time.

But Bob and Tyson are quick to point out some major drawbacks of online poker. On top of having to play against loose pockets, one loses many aspects of poker that some consider key essential parts of the game.

For example, a poker face is not a prerequisite for online poker.

"You can't ever really do a read on them," Tyson said.

Also, he says bluffing is made difficult by people who play loose with their money: "If you try to make a big bluff, you'll just get called on it."

And finally, the social atmosphere is lost. While players can chat with each other, Bob says that's just used for "talking shit."

But he still plays. The tournaments are what keep him interested, he says.

And although he's slowing down, he says in all, it's just getting bigger.

Getting Bigger Indeed

Last year, Christiansen Capital Advisors, a group that monitors the gambling industry, reported explosive growth in online gaming.

They reported there were about 2,000 gambling Web sites, which were predicted to bring in \$10 billion in 2005. That's on par with the revenue earned by the video game industry in 2004.

Additionally, they reported 12 million people worldwide gambled online in

2003, and 4.5 million of them were Americans.

It's numbers like these that have some lawmakers sweating.

Playing online poker is not illegal in the United States, but hosting it is. That means that all the major Web sites are maintained outside the border. PokerStars is located in Costa Rica and Party Poker is registered in the Government of Gibraltar. A message on the PokerStars Web site reads: "We abide by the laws and regulations where we do business."

Recently, a bill was introduced in the U.S. Congress that would outlaw online gambling.

"The explosive growth of the

Internet has provided a means for gambling operations to evade existing anti-gambling laws," Rep. Rick Boucher, (D-Va.) said when he was introducing the bill. "These Internet gambling Web sites typically operate offshore and often serve as a prime vehicle for money laundering and other criminal enterprises. Our bill sensibly updates federal law to keep pace with new technologies by bringing the Internet within the fold of the anti-gambling restrictions that govern telephones."

But precedent is on the side of the Web sites. The World Trade Organization ruled in 2005 that laws outlawing Internet gambling were illegal.

In Montana, the 2005 legislature passed a law specifically banning the operation of Internet gambling sites. Gene Huntington, the Montana administrator of the Gambling Control Division, said the states have just begun investigating how they can combat Internet gambling.

"Public gambling is regulated; private gambling isn't," he said. "Anyone who offers it or advertises it, it's illegal. For an individual to gamble is probably not illegal."

Huntington said the only case he's aware of in Montana of people violating online gambling laws was in Billings, when a man was putting an ad in the newspaper advertising a seminar to help people set up Internet gambling sites, and he knew of no prosecutions.

"It's a huge issue," he said. "It's an interesting issue."

The future of online gambling looks bright: the Christiansen Capital Advisors projects that online gambling revenue will surpass \$16 billion by 2009.

The game has come a long way since Hickok's dead man's hand. Now, players don't need to worry about shots in the back of the head like Wild Bill. But they do need to worry about their screen freezing before they see the flop.



Eleena Fikhman/Montana Kaimin

Bob has been dealing cards at the Press Box for two years. The Press Box hosts daily poker games, and pots for each hand can reach a maximum of \$300.

Landing the Big one

Las Vegas ‘whales’ see millions come and go with a roll of the dice and casinos know when they have a big one on the line

With \$250,000 you could easily pay for tuition, buy a new car, a new snowboard and a high-end fly-fishing rod and maybe even afford to purchase some prime Missoula real estate.

But would you ever consider taking that quarter-million, hoping on one of those handy Frontier flights from Missoula to Vegas and laying it all out on the table for the poker game of a lifetime?

Media tycoon Kerry Packer once went to Las Vegas and bet \$250,000 on a single hand of baccarat.

And lost.

But that wasn’t too bad.

It was the reported \$20 million that he gambled away at the Bellagio over the next three days that really had people talking.

For many of us, losing \$20 at the Press Box would be a bad night.

Losing \$200 would be devastating.

Losing \$20 million? Unfathomable.

But if you are Kerry Packer, whom the 2004 Business Review Weekly magazine estimated possessed an accumulated wealth of \$4.7 billion, seeing \$20 million disappear will hardly cause you to lose a good night’s sleep. In fact, you would barely know it was gone.

Gambling Magazine put it into perspective for the rest of us.

They estimated Packer’s fortune to be worth approximately \$4.5 billion, so losing \$20 million is no different than having \$4,500 to your name and gambling away just \$21.

Before his death from kidney failure last December, Packer, who owned numerous media sources including Aussieland’s most popular television channel, was the richest man in Australia and Las Vegas’ largest “whale.”

“Whale” is a term used to describe Vegas high rollers who play to win and lose millions and

are treated with extravagant luxury during their stay in Sin City.

Packer was known as one of the most accomplished and aggressive high rollers and received a large amount of criticism from some politicians in his country for his love of gambling.

“If someone has enough money to blow \$34 million (Australian dollars) at the casino,” Labor Party lawmaker Mark Latham told Australian news sources, “then they have enough money to pay more tax and help build a better society.”

But Packer never once apologized for his games of poker and baccarat.

“This is not someone else’s money,” Packer once told the Australian, a national newspaper, “this is mine, and I am entitled to spend it in any way I choose.”

Packer was often very successful at the tables and was known sometimes as a “hit-and-run” gambler who would win big at a casino and then leave before the casino had a chance to win back some of their money.

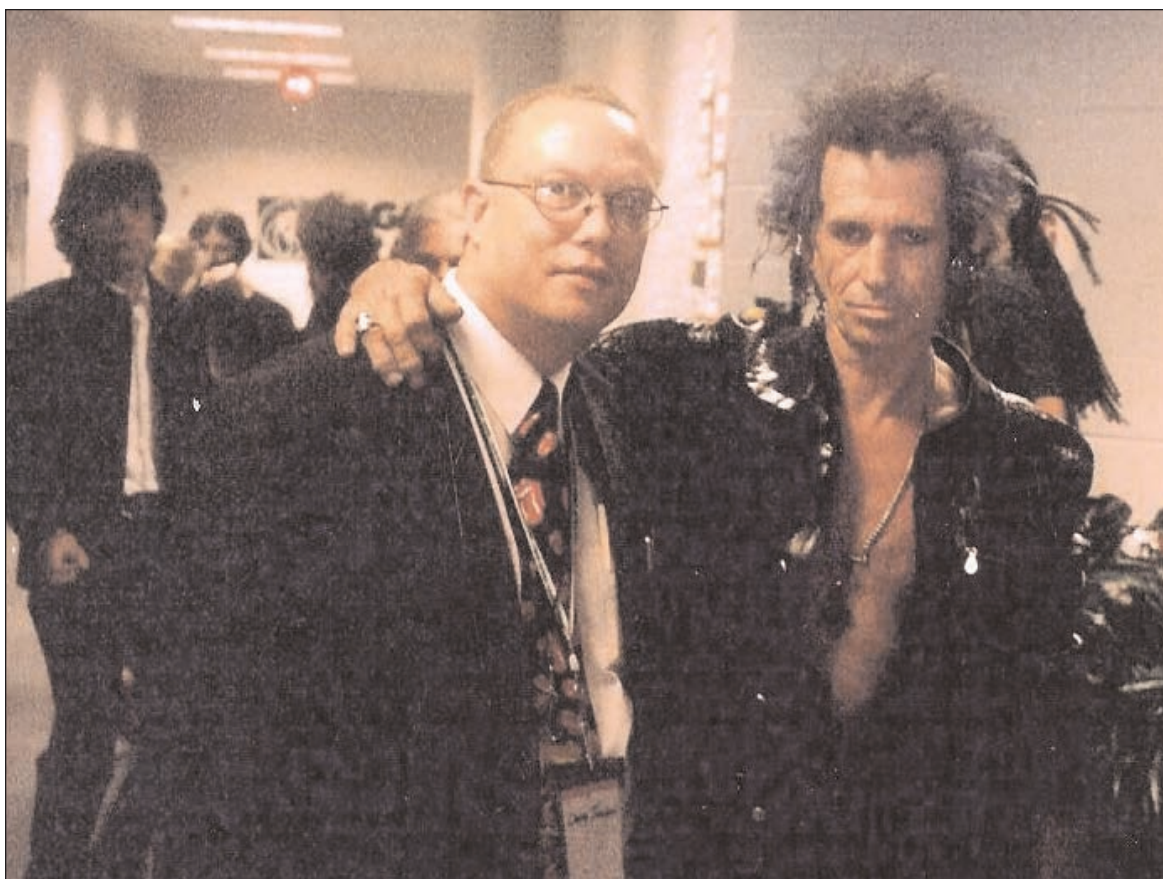
In fact, Packer was finally banned from Las Vegas’ MGM Grand Casino after winning \$26 million at blackjack.

Larry Johnson worked for nearly thirty years as the Events Coordinator for the MGM Grand Casino and had the duty to bring in entertainment to attract everybody from high rolling Aussies like Packer to your average American who flew into Vegas for a weekend of fun.

“You name them, we hire them,” Johnson said. “(MGM Grand) had the best entertainment.”

Johnson, who tells stories about his personal friendship with Rolling Stones keyboardist Chuck Leavell and his family and can make passing remarks like “Faith Hill, Tim McGraw and Allan Jackson are all very nice,” had his fair share of whale encounters during his years at the MGM Grand.

by Emma Schmautz



Larry Johnson walks with Kieth Richards of the Rolling Stones before a show at the MGM Grand in Las Vegas.

Photo courtesy of Larry Johnson

“Whales have unlimited funds,” Johnson said. “They like to gamble. We bring them in from all over the world.”

Johnson said that the MGM’s most favored customers receive airfare, lavish hotel suits, fine dining, limo services and tickets to the shows he books – all at the casino’s expense.

“The whole idea is to bring them out to enjoy the show,” Johnson said.

And hopefully afterward, the high rollers will bet big and lose big at the tables.

Before the Australian was banned, Johnson saw Packer numerous times at the MGM and uses a surprising choice of words to describe the whale from Down Under.

“He’s very humble,” Johnson said.

Johnson described a time when, after a large win, Packer gave a quarter-million-dollar tip to a cocktail waitress who promptly quit her job and bought a house.

Other stories involve Packer buying a high-end car such as a Mercedes-Benz or BMW and giving it to a valet.

“But he didn’t want people to know,” Johnson said of Packer’s generosity. “He just wanted to be treated like a normal person. He had the money to change people’s lives.”

Johnson said that many of the whales give their dealers, waitresses and valets extravagant tips so that competition to serve them is fierce.

One of the most important lessons the events coordinator learned in Vegas was the importance of treating everyone with equal respect.

He recalls a time when the MGM Grand was having Jimmy Page and Robert Plant from Led Zeppelin, and a 300-pound man who was nearly drunk and dressed in shorts came up to him and explained that he had backstage passes to meet the band.

Johnson’s initial thought was, “This guy’s big, overweight, reeks of alcohol, is in shorts (and) he’s just trying to get by me.”

Johnson treated the inebriated man very politely and after making some calls came to find out that he was one of MGM’s most valued gamblers.

He promptly sent the man through to hang out with the legendary members of Zeppelin.

“You don’t know who you’re talking to,” Johnson said. “Especially in Vegas. That’s what I always try to do in life – treat everybody the same.”

Johnson adheres to his philosophy when dealing with famous artists like Elton John, Janet Jackson and the Rolling Stones, or other celebrities such as Andre Agassi, Mike Tyson and Emeril Lagasse, and treats them as he would any guest of the MGM Grand.

“They’re humans just like you and me,” Johnson said. “They’re looking for bathrooms and food.”

Johnson enjoys bringing con-

certs not only to the high rollers but also to people who just simply love music.

Once a woman wrote him a letter explaining that her sister had terminal cancer and one of her biggest wishes was to see a Bee Gees’ concert.

“I was able to get her to meet the Bee Gees,” Johnson said. “It was one of the thrills of her life.”

Johnson said that he himself is not much of a gambler aside from occasionally putting a few quarters into some of the machines when he leaves his current home in Colorado to revisit Sin City.

But years of catering to whales like Packer and watching them bet a quarter million on a single hand of poker has left the events coordinator with a slight longing to, just once, be that risk-taking high roller with his fancy limousine and luxurious suit.

“I’ve always told my wife,” Johnson said, “that if I ever win a lot of money, I’d like to walk in the MGM, set down my briefcase and say, ‘Hey I’d like to gamble.’”

Westside Lanes

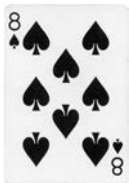
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Slow Play

The art of *by Danny Bobbe*

“ONE DOLLAR FOR 15 BEERS; THAT’S A GOOD RATIO.”

-NATHAN FRENCH,
SLOW PLAYER

Enter Disco Jim’s at noon because my house has no furniture and I want to watch college basketball and drink free beer.

Listen: let me teach you the art of slow play, a wonderful game in which the broke always win and the losers, casinos, are defeated because their policy — a drunk customer will spend more money in their establishment — is morally unsound.

Fact: Most casinos give complimentary alcoholic beverages to of-age people that play their machines.

Fact: Most casinos have rules about how many drinks they give away based on how much money and/or time a player spends in a casino.

Fact: These rules are easily manipulated.

Slow play, then, is by definition the practice of earning as many complimentary gifts in a casino as you can by playing games financially tight and sloth-like.

I take off my sunglasses and feed a dollar into a machine that features dancing leprechaun keno and a good view of the basketball game. In the worst-case scenario, that dollar, and Duke, will be the only things that lose today.

Before I play a single credit I must have a drink in my hand. In fact, according to my slow play mentor, Nathan French, “Never play without a beer in your hand.”

“No clink without a drink.” That is one tip for a successful slow play. Here are five more:

– If you put a larger bill into the machine you will present yourself as a more legitimate gambler; drinks will come more frequently after you establish this.

– Immediately reduce the speed of your machine to the lowest setting; this will set the pace for a proper slow play.

– Display your empty beer glass. Make it an eyesore and it will be filled more quickly.

– Never tip your waiter. A good slow-player protects all the money they bring into a casino. With that said, try to be as friendly as you can to your waitress.

– As soon as it becomes clear your comp has expired, cash out the remaining credits, no matter how few, and move on to the next casino. (Missoula has 35 listed in the phone book.)

And remember: “A nickel can get you 10 beers when slow-played properly,” French said.

Listen: slow playing is not always easy. Just like gambling, sometimes the player hits big and sometimes they leave disappointed.

There are casino workers who can pick out a slow-player 20 power stations away.

Don’t be discouraged. Confidence is a slow player’s greatest ally.

If called out for spending little money and reaping large rewards, try this defense first used by French in 2004.

“I’m just trying to gamble responsibly.”

This works because most casino



Avid slow-player Andy “Trip” Tripp slept on my couch for four months until it was recently removed. The night before this picture was taken, he tells me, he dreamt of playing keno machines.

nos try to give the impression that they care whether or not their customers are gambling away their child support money.

Follow it up with. “I like the casino atmosphere, but I just don’t have that much money to spare.”

Heartbreaking isn’t it?

Enter Andy “Trip” Tripp. He slept on my couch for perhaps four months, then the couch – and all of the other furniture – disappeared with an exiting roommate. Now he goes through the night in intermittent periods of wakefulness and zombie slumber. He jokes about sleeping on the Nintendo Power Pad, the popular ‘80s mat controller you operate with your feet. At night he tells me, when he does sleep, he dreams of playing keno machines.

“For some people slow-playing is a lifestyle,” he said. “I don’t claim it as my lifestyle, though on

any given night you can find me in the casino.”

So how lucrative can slow playing get? Quite lucrative.

Hefeweizen’s with giant lemon wedges at Montana Jack’s, pints of Fat Tire at the Press Box (only when that one girl is working) and Fig Newtons at Diamond Jim’s. There are players’ menus with dirt-cheap chicken wings, hourly cash give-aways

and, of course, there is always the possibility of turning your single dollar (commonly called a “bone”) into some serious cash.

It happened once to me playing keno, hitting five out of six with

an eight-times multiplier. The leprechaun began dancing and singing “more money.” I walked with \$25. Tripp said he once hit a most unlikely combination of bonuses and winning numbers that put \$390 into his pocket.

With all these free rewards and wicked vices, another problem a slow-player may face is his conscience.

Nonsense, says French. It’s all in good fun.

“It’s not actually a scam,” he said. “You can’t feel guilty about slow-playing.”

And remember: “One dollar for 15 beers; that’s a good ratio,” French said.

Slow-play Yoda: Nathan French

Just as every Daniel Son has a Mr. Miyagi and every petty thug has a Tonya Harding, I found a mentor in Nathan French. Born and raised in Missoula, French, 22, slow-plays with a grace and calm un-parallel to the average destitute young adult. He picks his keno numbers like Nicholson used to line up a 20-foot putt. He orders drinks with the style of a Kennedy or a pre-Monica Clinton. He climbs to the top of 20, 10-cent metaphors and accepts his friend’s apology for writing a lame profile about

him. He is what all slow-players should strive to be and will hopefully, one day, be recognized for what he has done for the art by being immortalized with his own keno game called: “Cruising in the Celeb’ with Ricki.”

What could possibly be his secret?

“Just enjoy the casino atmosphere,” he says.

And remember:

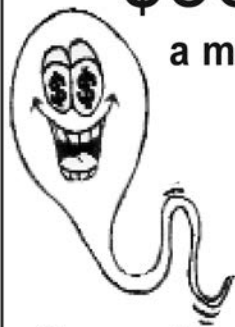
“A good slow-player knows there is nothing wrong with cashing out at a dollar.”



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Gambling in Montana is more than winning or losing; to many businesses and their employees, it's a livelihood.



Eleena Fikman/Montana Kaimin

By state law, winnings on video gaming machines must be at least 80 percent of what they take in. On most newer machines, it is closer to 93 percent. Actual cash-outs, however, are far lower.

Another day at the office



by Zachary Franz

Paradise Falls depends on gambling.

If the restaurant/bar suddenly lost its casino, the business might not survive, owner Tom McLaughlin said. McLaughlin and his 45 employees would be out of work.

"It would devastate us," he said.

The casino is tiny compared to the rest of the building. It's one small, dark room at the end of a big, bright restaurant.

Like just about all the casinos in Montana, it is unimpressive; a few rows of blinking, beeping, low-tech video games, old men and young women drinking beer or smoking cigarettes while they watch the screen and hit the button, fluorescent lights that do not betray whether it is day or night. Las Vegas regulars would be sorely disappointed.

But the tiny casino brings in over a third of Paradise Falls' income.

And McLaughlin isn't the only one counting his winnings at the end of the day. In 2002, businesses in Montana brought in \$88 million from gambling, after taxes and other expenses, according to a report by the University of Montana's Bureau of Business and Economic Research.

Gambling in Montana has increased every year since then, according to the Montana Gambling Control Division. In 2005, the average video gaming machine in Montana took in \$62.05 more than it paid out, every day. That's an increase of over \$12 from the previous year – for every machine, every day. The number of machines in Montana and their daily intake has increased almost every year since the Montana Legislature legalized video gaming in 1985.

But McLaughlin wants people to know that he is not greedy.

Casino owners aren't clearing huge profits and sitting on piles of money, he said. They have to pay vendors for use of the machines, they pay the casino attendants, they pay for the complimentary beverages given to players. And they pay taxes. The state gets 15 percent of whatever the house clears. That tax puts tens of millions of dollars into the general fund. About two-thirds of that money then gets sent back to the government of the county from which it came, said Rich Ask, of the Gambling Control Division. That meant about \$4 million for Missoula in 2005.

Still, most of those dollars already belonged to Montana.

"We are not destination gambling," Ask said.

Because of the state's relatively low maximum jackpot, \$800, and the fact that most surrounding states also have legalized gambling, not many people go out of their way to gamble in Montana. And the tourists who come for natural splendor report leaving few dollars in the keno machines, according to the Bureau of Economic Research. By and large, these millions of dollars are just getting shuffled around the state – sort of a voluntary tax.

But simply because gambling isn't a panacea for Montana doesn't mean it's an evil, says Paul Polzin of the Bureau for Economic Research. Lots of businesses just move money within the state – movie theaters, bowling alleys, grocery stores. Casinos are one more way people can choose to spend their discretionary income, Polzin says.

"You can't say gambling is good or bad," said Polzin. "You can't say a grocery store is good or bad ... it's really suspicious to put value judgments on these activities."

McLaughlin agrees.

"A lot of (gamblers) don't have boats or cabins," he said. "They choose to use their discretionary money gambling."

And McLaughlin doesn't see a problem with that, most of the time. Still, he recognizes that casinos face pitfalls that most grocery stores do not.

“YOU CAN'T SAY GAMBLING IS GOOD OR BAD.”

—PAUL POLZIN,
BUREAU FOR ECONOMIC
RESEARCH

"There are problem gamblers," he says. "We need to offer help for those with an addiction."

Paradise Falls has cut people off from gambling when they were getting in over their heads, McLaughlin said. He knows divorces and even suicides have

resulted from gambling addictions. McLaughlin is a decent guy. He likes watching his daughter play basketball for the Lady Griz. He doesn't want to be responsible for divorce and suicide.

"Those are terrible, unfortunate incidences," he said. "We take some responsibility for it. We try to let the public know there's help available."

The compulsive gamblers make up a very small percentage of the population, though, said McLaughlin and others in the industry.

"About 3 to 4 percent are compulsive gamblers," said Grant Lincoln, president of Century Gaming. "That mirrors the compulsiveness of any activity."

The gambling industry is trying hard to deal with the problem of addiction, he says.

"We've taken a lot of steps. The industry funds the support centers and the hot line," he said.

Part of the motivation is self-interest.

"Nobody wants people to get in

over their heads," said Lincoln. "It's like with alcohol. If somebody drinks too much, you lose them as a customer forever."

Montana will never be Las Vegas. Still, for McLaughlin, to the employees he thinks of as family and the hundreds of thousands of Montanans who disregard the odds, gambling is an important industry.

And that industry, which employs over 20,000 Montanans, doesn't look like it's going away anytime soon.

"I think it's pretty much accepted in Montana," said Steve Morris, a member of Montana's Gambling Advisory Council. "We don't see the big outcry that we saw years ago."

Back at Paradise Falls, McLaughlin doesn't seem to have any cause for concern. Even as he talks about gambling's impact on his business in his office one Friday morning, a steady stream of bills make their way into the machines downstairs.

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The OXFORD

by Chandra Johnson



Kevin Hoffman/Montana Kaimin

The bar has changed location slightly over the years, with its beginnings in historical Missoula on the banks of the Clark Fork River, but the Oxford remains one of the popular places for locals and strangers looking for a friendly game of Hold' Em.

Stepping into the Oxford in downtown Missoula is almost enough to make someone believe in time travel. Beyond the nondescript door lies a different world where local color has settled into the walls like perfume. The past whispers around every corner with the sounds of ice jumping against glasses and the cracking of billiard balls.

Middle-aged men sit at the pool table and in the diner. At the poker table, though, the guys are young. Lyle Cusson, 24, a University of Montana graduate in marketing and business management, speaks

of the time he spends at the Ox in terms of means and averages. On this particular night, he won \$115 at poker.

"I average about \$60 a night here [in winnings]. It varies a lot," Cusson said. Like many other students and young people who frequent the Ox, Cusson also comes for atmosphere. "It's related to the M&M in Butte as far as the open kitchen, and I like that. If they drop your toast, you watch them pick it up."

Members of the staff think youth frequent the nightly hold 'em games because the Oxford is a priceless relic of Missoula's past.

"If you go to New York, you want to go to Twenty-One," Mulligan said. "If you're in Missoula, you go to the Oxford."

The atmosphere of the Oxford is roughly 123 years in the making. Established in 1883 as a saloon in a tent on the bank of the Clark Fork River, the Ox seemed suited to owner Joan Mulligan when a psychic told her it was "full of spirits." Mulligan said it's the Ox's attitude that makes it a survivor.

"The Ox is a survivor. This is a tough old world and you've got your new casinos, but you don't have anything like this," Mulligan said.

That survival came at a price during the Depression. For decades, the basement of the Oxford became a haven for underground gambling, complete with

hidden staircases for quick get-aways in the event of a police sting. When Montana legalized gambling in 1973, the game simply moved upstairs and with it new technology that changed the art of cards.

Ralph Baker has a passion for poker. Originally from New Orleans, he began gambling as a

“IF THEY DROP YOUR TOAST,
YOU WATCH THEM PICK IT UP.”

-LYLE CUSSON, UM GRAD IN MARKETING
AND BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

16-year-old merchant seaman. He honed his expertise at the Ox, where he began his tenure as a poker dealer.

"I lost my ass (learning to play on a ship)," Baker said of his early gambling days. "But I learned to play real poker here."

As an Ox employee for 30 years, he's become a bit of an expert on the evolution of the Ox and gambling. Sitting in the Ox's back room where tournaments were once held, he says the Ox is

said poker was dealt a hard blow when the climate of heavy industry changed in western Montana, especially with the fold of mining in Butte and Anaconda.

"Poker is a game that involves disposable income," Baker said. "For a lot of those guys, when the economy went down the shitter, poker went with it."

With the decline of poker, the Oxford kept the game alive by moving it out of the back room and into the open near the bar.

Kenny Rupert deals poker at the Ox and has been working there off and on since the 1980s. A gambler since his youth in California, he agrees with Baker that poker is a game of challenge.

"It's mentally challenging," Rupert said. "It's my job to keep everything straight and keep it going quickly. The faster the game, the more the house makes."

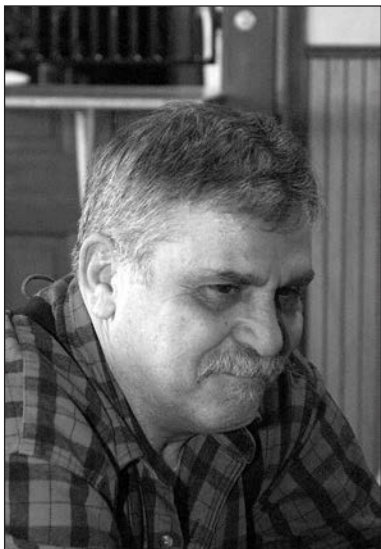
Whether the Ox haunts our hangovers or satisfies our thirst for another time, it stands as a relic of Missoula's history and even its leadership.

"The people who come in here really make the Oxford," said Bruce Howe, Mulligan's son and manager of the Ox.

President Theodore Roosevelt once addressed Missoula residents a block from the Ox in 1912. Former Montana Senator Mike Mansfield chose the Ox as his campaign headquarters in the early years of his political career. Mulligan told numerous stories of how she and her husband met people all over the United States who had visited the Ox. Howe said he'd met people who knew the Ox in Jamaica.

Mulligan and Howe insist it's the people who keep the Ox alive, partially out of nostalgia.

"They come in and can't believe this place is here," Mulligan said. "I don't know how you put it into words, but you don't find places like this anymore."



Kevin Hoffman//Montana Kaimin

Ralph Baker deals poker and manages the Oxford. As an employee at the Ox for almost 30 years he has seen the transition of the Oxford's poker game from a select few regulars to a popular game with fresh faces and a friendly low buy in.

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Missoula gambling hot spots



by Brenna Moore

Lady luck is a frequent visitor to the casinos in Missoula.

And with roughly 40 casinos in town, Missoula is indeed a place where gamblers like to drop a dollar, or more.

"A casino is a casino, anywhere you go," said Curtis Ames, general manager of Paradise Falls.

While the purpose of a casino is fairly simple – welcome the customers, provide drinks and keep the dough rolling – there are casinos in Missoula that aim to stand out from the bunch. Here are some of Missoula's top casinos, just to name a few, and why gamblers find them so addictive.

Diamond Jim's Casino

With three locations in Missoula, the latest featuring Video Poker, Keno machines and a friendly staff, it is no wonder that Diamond Jim's was rated best casino in the Missoulian's 2006 Reader's Choice Awards. The Missoulian prints an article annually with the results of its "Missoula's Choice poll," in which hundreds of Missoula residents vote on the best aspects of the town. Diamond Jim's was at the top of the list because of the casino's player stations, which people find particularly attractive, said assistant manager Keller Sommerauer. To participate, gamblers can sign up for the gambling machines – called stations – and play to get points. At a certain level, the points then turn into free money to gamble with, Sommerauer said. Also, every Tuesday at the Diamond Jim's located on Brooks, there is a free drawing for a money giveaway for five lucky winners, with prizes ranging from a \$5 match-play to \$20 during special events, like Mardi Gras or St. Patrick's Day. To become a Tuesday winner, gamblers can swipe their player

station cards once a day to get a ticket. Each week the casino picks 5 tickets and the winners receive \$5 for match-play. That means the casino will match the \$5 the gambler puts in the machine, providing an extra \$5 to gamble with, said Kelly Ogarek, a bartender. Gamblers looking to refresh themselves while playing should expect the house-blend beer and domestic draft beers to be on the house, but the casino charges for drinks from the bar.

The Magic Diamond

For people who don't like gambling in a cloud of smoke, the Magic Diamond is the casino for them. It is the only original casino in Missoula that is entirely smoke-free, manager Jane Damron said. The Magic Diamond was the runner up for the best casino in the Missoulian's Reader's Choice awards. "We got second. With one location, that's pretty good. Number one has three locations," Damron said. The Magic Diamond also offers the player's club and new members can sign up and receive \$5 match-play from the casino. The casino has all the latest games, including seven power stations and five new megaplex machines. It also offers complimentary drinks to those who gamble, Damron said. The Magic Diamond has a lounge with a buy-one-drink-get-one-free happy hour from 5-7 p.m. daily, as well as a full liquor store. The liquor store fills growlers, half-gallon jugs of beer, for \$7.50. "That's something the university kids like," Damron said. However, the casino is open only from 7 a.m. to 2 a.m., which is different from most casinos in Missoula that are open 24 hours.

The Silvertip Casino

For a clean and private place to gamble, risk-takers should make



Amanda Determan/Montana Kaimin

Lane Fladager comes to the Claim Jumper Casino at least three times a week to play video poker. Gambling for Fladager is a relaxing activity, something he does to escape from everyday stresses.

their way over to the Silvertip Casino. "People know that they can come in here, maybe gamble ... whatever time of day or evening and not worry about it. They feel safe here," daytime supervisor Forrest Moon said. The Silvertip finished in third place in the 2006 Reader's Choice awards. The casino currently has a promotion going on for daily drawings for \$100. People can come in and sign up, and if the ticket number posted matches their number, they have 24 hours to claim their money, Moon said. The casino also has "shake-a-day", a game that costs 50 cents to roll five dice at most once per day. Five of a kind wins the pot, three of a kind gets another shake and four of a kind gets a draft beer or a drink, Moon said.

Broadway Sports Bar, Grill and Casino

Privacy, great service and a clean establishment are some of the traits the Broadway has to offer its betting customers. It offers a "lucky butt" drawing every hour, and prizes range from \$5 match-play to food certificates to \$100 in cash, general manager Rick Summers said. It also has a closed-off gambling room away from the bar and the restaurant and free drinks for gamblers. "It's a good place to gamble because nobody really knows that they're here," Summers said.

Paradise Falls

For a gambler who's into poker, Paradise Falls' casino offers a separate room for live poker, general

manager Curtis Ames said. It also has a new I-track player's club system that tracks how much customers play and eventually gives them free money with which to gamble, Ames said. On Mondays and Fridays, the casino offers \$5 for \$5 match-play for player members. And on Thursday and Sunday nights, the poker table puts on a free-roll tournament, where players can get a certain amount of chips (no monetary amount) to play for free. At the end of the tournament, the first-, second- and third-place winners get money to play on the table in an actual money game, Ames said. Last year, Paradise Falls got third place in the Reader's Choice awards from the Missoulian, Ames said.

DEALER

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didn't concern him, though, because he "could always make it back."

While Engebretsen didn't have trouble making back money he'd lost at the poker tables, he said other gamblers at his table sometimes aren't as fortunate. Even though he sees people gambling more than they can afford, he said he doesn't get involved in other people's financial decisions.

"I've seen a lot of people lose their rent, their car payments, 'cause they always think they can make it back," Engebretsen said. He advises gamblers to follow the classic Kenny Rogers adage: "You gotta know when to hold 'em, know when to fold 'em."

Becoming a poker dealer isn't

exactly easy. There are more than 900 licensed card dealers in Montana, and each must pass an extensive background check and have their application accepted by the state in order to get a license. The initial license fee is \$75, and must be renewed every year for \$25.

In addition to the bureaucratic hurdles, Engebretsen said dealing cards is extremely competitive because it is so profitable and so many people want to do it. Dealers are rated on how many hands they can deal per hour. A beginner will deal about 25 hands per hour, while more experienced dealers will deal closer to 35 to 40 hands an hour.

"The better the dealer, the more money he'll make, and the more money the house will make," Engebretsen said. If a dealer can't keep up the pace, there's always

someone willing to step into his place, he said.

Kevin Fulbright, who runs the card tables at Flipper's, put Engebretsen in the upper rankings of card dealers, at around 35 hands per hour.

"He's fast, very professional. He knows all the rules and regulations to a T," Fulbright said.

But despite Engebretsen's skills, he said the job has its drawbacks. Because he makes most of his money in cash, he said it's easy to spend it rather than deposit it into a savings account, for example.

UM student Todd Richey, 21, has been Engebretsen's roommate for two years. He said he enjoys Engebretsen's company, but doesn't get to see him that often.

"He'll have just gone to sleep right when I'm going to school,"

Richey said.

Overall, the perks far outweigh the downsides, Engebretsen said. He said he enjoys meeting a wide variety of people at the card table, and he's made connections with several Montana businessmen

through his job dealing cards. And, of course, there's the money.

"The money's worth it," Engebretsen said. "It's the best job a college student could have."



A fair deal

by Sean Breslin

“WHEN YOU DEAL POKER, IT’S
HARD NOT TO PLAY POKER.”
—TAIT ENGBRETSSEN,
POKER DEALER

The new card room at Flipper’s Casino on Third Street is a sharp contrast to the rest of the building. The bar and slot machine areas are dim and smoky, the colors muted by an absence of natural light and dulled by years of cigarette smoke. But the card room, completed in November 2005, practically shines through the haze.

Set on the north side of the building, the card room features two tables, each capable of seating up to nine players. Plush faux-leather office chairs surround the red-felted tables, and knee-high end tables give gamblers a place to set their beers.

The bright overhead lights give all the players — and the dealer, University of Montana student Tait Engebretsen — a clear view of the cards. With players bringing an average of \$50 to \$100 to the table, it’s important to be able to see what’s going on.

“You’ve gotta be in control of all aspects of the game,” Engebretsen said.

People have a tendency to blame the dealer for a bad hand, he said. He usually just lets snide comments or sarcastic thank yous slide, but every once in a while an angry gambler will go too far.

“You have to take a lot of shit, but you only have to take so much

before you can ask someone to leave,” Engebretsen said.

Engebretsen has been dealing cards professionally for three years. While bartending at the Magic Diamond Casino, he met John Golder, who ran the card game at the Silvertip Casino. Golder took a shine to Engebretsen, and taught him how to deal and about the different types of poker. He considers himself lucky for meeting Golder, because getting a job as a dealer sometimes just comes down to knowing the right people, he said.

Engebretsen likes dealing cards because of how much money he can make. He makes roughly between \$30 and \$60 an hour, but has made upwards of \$120 per hour, he said.

Engebretsen now works only a couple nights per week, but when he got started, he regularly worked 56-hour weekends, starting Friday nights and ending in the early morning hours on Monday. He began working so much that he decided to take a year off school, but returned to UM as a full-time student this semester.

“Starting Wednesday night, I wouldn’t go to sleep until 4 a.m. (Friday),” he said of his weeknight shifts. “I’ve learned to operate on little or no sleep.”

On those long weekends,



Tait Engebretsen deals in his fourth card room at Flipper’s casino. Engebretsen started dealing four years ago at the Silvertip casino and can make around \$400 a night in tips.

Mark Maher/Kaimin

Engebretsen made between \$1,200 and \$1,700, he said. He only got paid about six dollars an hour, but made most of his money through “tokens”: poker slang for tips.

Earning all that cash has given Engebretsen a jaded sense of money, he said. Although he regularly made more than \$1,000 on a weekend dealing cards, he didn’t just stay on one side of the table.

“When you deal poker, it’s hard not to play poker,” Engebretsen said. He would gamble — and sometimes lose — more than \$1,000 over a two-day stretch. It

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